

## CHAPTER 7. THE MIDDLE GROUP

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Most burials in the archaeologically excavated portion of the African Burial Ground are placed in the main or Middle Group, by default, because they were not clearly assignable to earlier or later cohorts. Yet even though the temporal groupings are relative rather than absolute, it is likely that burials assigned to the Middle Group were indeed interred during the middle decades of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. For convenience, we describe the period of New York's history from approximately 1735 to 1760, when the cemetery would have been intensively used.

A sketch of the town and the development in the area of the burial ground is presented, along with an overview of the African population and the mortuary sample. The material culture and spatial distribution of the Middle Group burials are then discussed, followed by a description of some unique and unusual interments.

### **7.A. *The town***

The city was in an economic recession in the 1730s. Aside from the almshouse complex, begun in 1735 on the Common, construction in the area near the African Burial Ground was minimal. But the city's inexorable northward push soon resumed. Residential and commercial development proceeded up the west side of Broadway, to present-day Warren Street (at the southwest corner of the burial ground). Development on the east side of town extended even further north. The relative remoteness of the African Burial Ground also was reduced when the road along the east side of the Common (Park Row) was cut through to the Bowery, and Pearl Street was extended westward. Two pleasure grounds northwest of the cemetery, the Ranelagh Gardens and the Vauxhall Gardens, drew city residents beyond the settled edge of the town (see the Grim, Maerschalk, and Montessor Plans [Figures 2.9, 2.10, and 3.2], and Harris et al. 1993; Homberger 1994; Hunter Research 1994).

The Corselius/Crolius and Remmey pottery works were located in the eastern part of the Van Borsum patent by 1741. These pottery works shared space with the African Burial Ground, and at least one of them used a portion of the cemetery as a dump for waste material from the kilns. A palisade that spanned the width of the city was erected in 1745. It crossed the southern portion of the African Burial Ground and burials were probably restricted to the area north of its line-of-march. While the palisade stood, access from the town to the cemetery required passing through a gate.

The Common drew large crowds in 1739-40, and again in 1741. Thousands of whites and blacks turned out to hear evangelist George Whitefield preach in 1739-40 at the height of a surge in religious enthusiasm called the Great Awakening (Burrows and Wallace 1999:157-58). Protestant churches during this time were reluctant to accept Africans, but the evangelicals called for the baptism and humane treatment of captives. There is no evidence that the enslaved Africans of New York embraced evangelical Protestant faith as a result, though some contemporaries would suggest that Africans were spurred to insurrection in 1741 by the preaching (see Linebaugh and Rediker 2000:192-193). The churches of New York did have black congregants, though few in number, during the middle decades of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Only three burials of blacks were recorded, one in the Dutch Reformed churchyard in 1729 (a free black woman) and two in the churchyard of Trinity Lutheran in the 1740s, one of a free black woman and one of an illegitimate “mulatto” child (Reformed Dutch Church 1727-1804; Stryker-Rodda 1974:84-85).

A year after Whitefield’s visit, crowds assembled again to watch the executions of thirty enslaved Africans and four Europeans convicted of conspiring to burn the town. The Panic or “Conspiracy” of 1741 centered on a series of fires set during late March and early April. A grand jury concluded that the alleged arsonists were part of a wider network involving the city’s black population and a handful of European ringleaders. Over 200 people were arrested, with the aid of testimony coerced under threat, extricated through torture, or purchased through cash rewards. Underground activity involving the participation of both blacks and poor whites was exposed, highlighting the ability of people on the margins of society to move about, meet clandestinely, frequent taverns, plan and launch criminal actions, organize clubs, and forge unions with free persons.<sup>1</sup> Thirteen of the convicted Africans were burned at the stake and seventeen were hung. The hangings took place near the powder house at the south end of the Fresh Water pond, the burnings a bit further to the southeast (Figure 2.9). It is not known when and where the executed were buried. The corpses of some of those who were gibbeted were left in chains to rot (see Lepore 2005:170-171), the desecration of the corpses constituting both an added punishment of the convicted and a warning to the community.

Did city residents gather on the Common to celebrate Pinkster, the Dutch holiday of Pentecost (English Whitsuntide)? The holiday was marked in New Netherland from at least the 1640s. By the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Africans in New York colony and New England held distinctive celebrations, using town commons, for Pinkster and Negro Election Day, respectively. These festivals involved large gatherings for drumming,

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<sup>1</sup> The events have been variously interpreted as a trumped-up conspiracy and subsequent “witch-hunt,” the actions of a theft ring that were prosecuted over-zealously, a true conspiracy but one that was limited in scope, or a proletarian “revolutionary conspiracy, Atlantic in scope” (Linebaugh and Rediker 2000:177-179). The records of the events caution us, in any case, about separating the African community from other ethnic groups too absolutely: overlapping social and economic networks among African, Native American, Spanish, English, and Irish New Yorkers were revealed by the investigation. The primary source is Daniel Horsmanden’s *Journal*, published in 1744 (see LePore 2005). For analyses of the conspiracy, see Stokes 1915-28 (4):569-575; Szasz 1967; Launitz-Schürer, Jr. 1980; Davis 1985; Foote 2004; Lepore 2005.

dance, food, drink, and lampooning typical of carnival. There is no documentary evidence for large-scale celebrations of black Pinkster in New York City.<sup>2</sup>

Legal restrictions on the economic pursuits of bondsmen and women were tightened in this period, thereby providing an unintended glimpse of how black New Yorkers sought to gain a foothold in the economy. In August 1740, for example, the Common Council passed a law restricting the marketing of produce, stating that

of Late Years great Numbers of Negros Indians and Molatto Slaves have Made it a common Practice of Buying, Selling and Exposing to Sale, not Only in houses, out houses & yards but Likewise in the Publick Streets Within this City, great Quantities of Boiled Indian Corn, Pears, Peaches, Apples and other kind of fruit which pernicious practice is not only Detrimental to the Masters Mistresses and Owners of such Slaves in Regard they Absent themselves from their Service: But is also productive of Encreasing if not Occasioning many and Dangerous fevours and other Distempers & Diseases in the Inhabitants in the same city [MCC 1675-1776 (4):497-98].<sup>3</sup>

Marketers who came into the city from the country and the Out Ward were exempted from the restriction and the penalty that accompanied it (public whipping or a 6s. fine payable by the slaveholder), so long as they had the permission of their legal master. The law refers not to the city's municipal markets, but to unregulated venues such as homes and streets where Africans bought produce for resale. Since it was already illegal to trade with enslaved persons without permission, the need for a special ordinance suggests there had been a noticeable lapse in enforcement.

## **7.B. *The population***

### Census

The black population of New York grew substantially from the mid 1730s to the mid 1740s, census figures indicating a 42% increase. Children (defined as ten and under in 1737 and fifteen and under in 1746) account for the increase. Black residents numbered 2,444 in 1746. This was the 18<sup>th</sup> century high mark of 20.9% of the total population. The distribution by age and sex in four census years is shown in Table 7.1.

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<sup>2</sup> For discussions of Pinkster in New York, see Lepore 2005:158-159; Hodges 1999:25, 221-223; Epperson 1999:94-96; Stuckey 1994; White 1991:95-106. In his novel *Satanstoe*, James Fenimore Cooper (1845[1912:66-79]) wrote a fictional account of a 1757 Pinkster holiday in New York City. The story locates the celebrations at the upper end of Broadway on the Common, with whites in attendance as spectators. Since no such public festival is recorded for the city, it is possible his story was based on oral tradition from the upper Hudson Valley area.

<sup>3</sup> During the 18<sup>th</sup> century similar laws were passed in towns throughout the English colonies, reflecting widespread participation of the enslaved in local economies.

<b>Table 7.1.</b>						
<b>Black population by age and sex, 1737-1756</b>						
<b>Year</b>	<b>Adults</b>		<b>Children</b>		<b>Age for children</b>	<b>Label in census</b>
	(male)	(female)	(male)	(female)		
1737	674	609	229	207	<11	"black"
1746*	721	569	419	735	<16	"black"
1749*	651	701	460	556	<16	"black"
1756*	672	695	468	443	<16	"black"
Source: Green and Harrington (1932); U.S. Bureau of the Census (1909).						
*Black adult males include 76 males over 60 in 1746, 41 males over 60 in 1749, and 68 males over 60 in 1756.						

Imports of enslaved Africans into New York continued from both the Caribbean and Africa during the mid 1700s, although precise figures are difficult to reconstruct. It is possible that following the 1741 panic, when Africans from the Caribbean were implicated in the 1741 conspiracy, importation of captives directly from Africa increased.<sup>4</sup> The sense among New York merchants was that the Caribbean colonies had been transporting troublesome captives to the northern colonies, and in fact there is evidence that seasoned insurrectionists from the islands played a role in the New York conspiracy (Linebaugh and Rediker 2000:193-203). It is also possible that greater numbers of children, especially young girls, were brought to the city beginning in the 1740s due to greater demand for domestic labor and anxiety about insurrection by seasoned men. The preponderance of girls over boys and of adult men over women in the 1746 census probably reflects these market shifts. As noted in Chapter 13 of the Skeletal Biology Report (Blakey et al. 2004b), the local urban demand for girls would be satisfied via the direct African trade.

### Mortuary sample

Nearly half of the burials excavated at the African Burial Ground are placed in the Middle Group (n=199). Burials are listed in Table 7.2 and shown on the site plan in Figures 7.1a-e. In the table, head angle is the orientation in degrees west of north (discussed in Chapter 5). Preservation codes are explained in Chapter 3. An entry of "n/a" in the coffin column indicates that the bones were severely disturbed, displaced, or re-deposited so that coffin presence/absence could not be determined. The age and sex profiles for the mortuary sample are shown in Figures 7.2 and 7.3. The age profile carries a caveat: we noted in Chapter 5 that the frequency of child burials in this cohort is higher than that in the overall skeletal sample, and proposed that some of these burials may actually belong in the Late-Middle or Late Groups, though there is no way to so assign them.

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<sup>4</sup> Lydon (1978:378, 387-88) compiled data showing that 70% of captives brought to New York Colony prior to 1742 were imported from American sources, with the ratio almost exactly reversed subsequently, and his information from shipping records indicates a marked increase in the African trade in the late 1740s.

**Table 7.2.**  
**Middle Group burials**

Burial	Low age	High age	Sex	Head angle	Grid East	Grid South	Preservation	Coffin
B003	25	35	male		2	107	n	n/a
B008	0	0.5	undete	101	5	82.5	y	hexagonal
B009	35	45	male	90	25	89.5	y	hexagonal
B016	50	60	female	67	0	107	y	hexagonal
B017	4	6	undete	89	20	83.25	y	hexagonal
B019			undete	108	20	81.5	Y	unident.
B021			undete		20	87.5	n	rectangle
B022	2.5	4.5	undete	90	-1.5	96.5	y	unident.
B024	3	6	undete	92	5	87.5	y	rectangle
B025	20	24	female	96	20	87.5	y	unident.
B027	1.4	2.8	undete	74	5	88.5	y	hexagonal
B030	7	11	undete	92	10	86	y	hexagonal
B031	14	16	undete	90	-1	103.5	y	hexagonal
B032	50	60	male	100	23.5	86.5	y	hexagonal?
B035	8	10	undete	93	15	87.5	y	hexagonal
B039	5	7	undete	82	40	81.75	y	hexagonal
B041			undete	66	-11	99.5	n	unident.
B045	2.5	4.5	undete	86	-5	103.5	y	hexagonal
B046			female?	86	0	95.5	y	unident.
B047	35	45	male	94	0	103.5	y	hexagonal?
B049	40	50	female	82	40	87.5	y	hexagonal
B050			undete	90	30	87.5	y	hexagonal
B053	0.25	0.75	undete	90	0	87.5	y	hexagonal
B055	3	5	undete	93	0	92.2	y	hexagonal
B056	30	34	female	90	17	87.5	y	hexagonal?
B057	0.88	2.16	undete	90	25	87.5	y	hexagonal
B066	0	0.16	undete	90	25	93.5	y	unident.
B069	30	60	male	82	-3.5	89	y (no cranium)	hexagonal?
B070	35	45	male	90	10	92.5	y (no cranium)	hexagonal
B073	20	30	female?	96	10	79	y	hexagonal
B074			n/a	97	15	80	n (empty coffin)	hexagonal
B075	0	0	undete	97	34	92.5	y	rectangle
B077	0.67	1.3	undete	110	35	88.5	y	hexagonal
B079	0.25	0.75	undete	90	6	82	y	tapered
B080			undete	88	40	87.5	y	hexagonal
B081			female	90	-3	93	y (no cranium)	unident.
B082	18	25	female	86	3	93	y (cranium only)	unident.
B085	0.25	0.75	undete	89	15	80.5	y	hexagonal

**Table 7.2.**  
**Middle Group burials**

Burial	Low age	High age	Sex	Head angle	Grid East	Grid South	Preservation	Coffin
B087	4	6	undete	90	3	94	y (cranium only)	unident.
B090	35	40	female	90	4	81.5	y	hexagonal
B093			undete		-3	85	n	unident.
B094			undete	80	47	92.5	y	hexagonal
B096	16	18	male	71	47	94.5	y	hexagonal
B098	1	2	undete	90	20	81	y	hexagonal
B100			undete	90	20	80.5	y	hexagonal
B102	1.33	2.67	undete	90	20	79.5	y	hexagonal
B103			undete	86	20	79.5	y	hexagonal
B104	30	40	female	77	61	89.5	y	hexagonal
B111	0.67	1.33	undete	73	53	91.5	y	four-sided?
B112	0.25	0.75	undete		82.5	89	y	unident.
B113			undete	85	60	91.5	y	unident.
B114	45	50	male	100	91	94.5	y	hexagonal
B115	25	35	female	94	89	89.5	y	hexagonal
B116	45	55	male	100	81.5	95.5	y	hexagonal
B118			undete		55	94.5	n	unident.
B122	18	20	female	86	61	93	y	hexagonal
B126	3.5	5.5	undete	110	80.5	88	y	hexagonal
B127	0.67	1.33	undete	94	95	90	y	hexagonal
B128	0	0.17	undete	89	83	92.5	y	hexagonal
B129			n/a	97	95	91.5	n (empty coffin)	unident.
B130	1	2	undete	89	56	92	y	hexagonal
B133	1	2	undete	76	78	96	y	hexagonal
B136			undete		86.7	95	y	unident.
B142	25	30	female	95	90	88	y	hexagonal
B143	6	10	undete	111	80.5	88	y	hexagonal
B144	0	0.17	undete	99	90	88	y	four-sided
B148	12	18	undete	93	70	91.5	y	hexagonal
B149	0.5	1	undete	97	90	88	y	four-sided
B154	25	29	female	88	75	95.5	y	hexagonal
B156	30	60	female		115	66.5	y	unident.
B159	25	35	female	89	90	73.5	y	hexagonal
B160	3.5	5.5	undete	93	98.5	73	y	four-sided
B161			undete	83	90	74.5	y	rectangle
B163	18	24	male?	89	99	74.5	y	hexagonal
B167	8.5	12.5	undete	99	65	86.5	y	hexagonal
B169	5.5	9.5	undete	114	81	91.5	y	hexagonal?
B175	24	28	male		64.5	72	n	unident.
B189			undete	90	65.5	95.5	n	unident.
B206			undete		93	75.5	y	rectangle

**Table 7.2.**  
**Middle Group burials**

Burial	Low age	High age	Sex	Head angle	Grid East	Grid South	Preservation	Coffin
B212	4.5	5.5	undete	85	55	82.5	y (no cranium)	hexagonal?
B213	45	55	female	93	85.5	84.5	y	hexagonal
B215	0	0.16	undete	111	72.5	81.5	y	four-sided?
B218	0.5	3.5	undete	105	73	89	y	unident.
B220			undete	95	92	78	y	tapered
B224	0.5	1.33	undete	86	97	77.5	y	four-sided
B231			undete		97	77.5	y	four-sided
B232			undete		97	77.5	y	unident.
B233			n/a	90	127	73	n	rectangle
B234	0	0.5	undete	107	96.5	77.5	y	tapered
B239	1.5	3.5	undete	109	70	83.5	y	tapered
B240	0.88	2.66	undete	90	95.5	79.5	y	hexagonal?
B245	2.5	4.5	undete	93	85.5	75	y	hexagonal
B246	0.5	2.9	undete	92	70	82.5	y	four-sided
B248	14	15	undete	90	118.5	71.2	n	unident.
B254	3.5	5.5	undete	96	97.5	79.5	y	unident.
B255	0	0.17	undete	90	117.9	79.3	y	hexagonal?
B256	40	60	male	93	79	77.5	y	hexagonal
B258	0	0.5	undete	104	78	85.5	y	four-sided
B260			undete	94	53.5	84.5	n	n/a
B265	0.5	1	undete	95	120	82	y	hexagonal?
B268	0	0.5	undete	96	125.5	74.5	y	hexagonal?
B270			male	97	123.5	84.5	y	unident.
B271	45	57	male	103	65	76.5	y	hexagonal
B275			female?	96	50	81	n	unident.
B277			undete	92	51	77.5	n	unident.
B283	0.33	0.67	undete	104	123	76	y	hexagonal
B284	21	28	male	86	115.5	80.5	y	unident.
B285	20	30	female	102	64	80.5	y	hexagonal
B286	4.4	8.5	undete	89	126	75	y	hexagonal?
B287	18	20	male	95	53	73.5	y (no cranium)	unident.
B288			undete		120	74.5	n	n/a
B291	3	5	undete		94	82.5	n	n/a
B292			undete		121	72.5	n	unident.
B293			male?	106	94	82.5	n	hexagonal
B294	0.5	1	undete	96	86.5	88	y	hexagonal
B295	30	50	female	110	70	82	y	hexagonal
B296	0.5	2.9	undete	68	98	84	n	unident.
B298	0.67	1.33	undete		123	66.5	n	unident.
B300			undete	106	125.5	76	y	hexagonal?
B301			undete	99	100.5	86	n	n/a

**Table 7.2.**  
**Middle Group burials**

Burial	Low age	High age	Sex	Head angle	Grid East	Grid South	Preservation	Coffin
B301a			undete		100.5	86	n	n/a
B302			female?	99	99.5	88.5	n	n/a
B303	0.5	1	undete	100	76.5	73.5	n	n/a
B304	3	5	undete	90	109	81.5	y	tapered
B306	28	44	male	88	125	76.5	y	hexagonal
B310	44	52	female	99	60	75.5	y	hexagonal
B312	0	0.3	undete	94	67	75	y	rectangle
B315	30	40	female	88	127	83	y	hexagonal?
B318	7.5	14	undete	116	144	78	n	n/a
B320	2	4	undete	120	251.5	90	y	unident.
B321	1	2	undete	117	143	79.5	y	hexagonal
B324	25	35	female	90	132	69	y	hexagonal
B326	45	55	male	96	135	73.5	y	hexagonal
B328	40	50	female	88	241	84.5	y	hexagonal
B334			undete	111	251	89	y	unident.
B335	25	35	female	127	248	84.5	y	hexagonal
B336	0.5	1	undete	92	125.5	83	y	hexagonal?
B339			undete	86	123	83	n	unident.
B341			male	103	229.5	87.5	y	hexagonal
B344	25	35	male?		255	87.5	n	unident.
B345			undete		254	74.5	n	n/a
B347	0.5	1	undete	98	130	73.5	y	hexagonal
B348	1	2	undete	112	138	66	y	hexagonal
B349	0	0.5	undete	94	132	72	y	unident.
B350			undete		133.5	82	n	n/a
B351	50	60	male	106	145	84.5	y	hexagonal
B353	24	34	male	112	230	84.5	y	hexagonal
B355			undete		235	74.5	n	n/a
B356			undete	128	248	84.5	y	shared
B358			female?	126	230	89.5	n	unident.
B359			undete	95	127.5	84.5	n	unident.
B360			undete		235	75.5	y	unident.
B365			female	195	257.5	79.5	n	unident.
B366	34	62	undete	118	224	78	y	hexagonal
B367	25	35	female?		130	72	n	n/a
B368	10.5	13.5	undete	95	246.5	80.5	y	unident.
B370	2	4	undete	75	146.5	82	y	hexagonal?
B371	25	35	female	115	235	69	y	no coffin
B372	25	35	female		235	81	n	n/a
B374	0	0.25	undete	93	132.5	72	y	unident.
B375	16	18	female	120	253	74.5	y	no coffin
B378			undete		235	75.5	n (not excavated)	unident.



**Table 7.2.**  
**Middle Group burials**

Burial	Low age	High age	Sex	Head angle	Grid East	Grid South	Preservation	Coffin
B379	30	40	male	109	215	71.5	y	hexagonal
B380	40	60	male	98	241	85	y	hexagonal
B383	14	18	female		245	79	y	hexagonal
B384	25	45	female	80	248	91.5	y	hexagonal
B385	40	60	female	121	251.5	86	y	hexagonal
B390	25	35	male	94	140	71.5	n	n/a
B393	-0.17	0.17	undete	119	211	84	y	hexagonal?
B394	16	25	undete		185	59.5	n	n/a
B396	6.5	8.5	undete	108	224	82.5	y	hexagonal
B397	30	40	female	100	229	87	y	hexagonal
B398	25	35	undete		255.5	93	n	n/a
B399	0	0.3	undete	106	213	78	y	rectangle
B400	25	35	male	85	130	65.5	y	hexagonal
B403	39	65	male	113	255.5	93	n	unident.
B405	6	10	undete	119	211.8	83.9	y	hexagonal?
B406	0	0.5	undete	280	253.5	68.25	y	hexagonal?
B408			male?		158	79.5	n/a	n/a
B409			n/a		184	88	n/a	n/a
B410			female	95	178	69.5	y	hexagonal
B412	0	0	undete		218.5	78.5	y	unident.
B414	39	59	male	112	165	74	y	unident.
B415	35	55	male	99	215	81	y	hexagonal
B417	9.5	14.5	undete		165	64.5	y	unident.
B418	30	55	male	106	163	64.5	y	unident.
B419	48	62	male	117	206.5	71.5	y	hexagonal
B420	35	45	male		186.5	69.5	n	n/a
B422			undete		212.5	86.5	n	unident.
B423			n/a		162	67	n (not excavated)	unident.
B424			undete		220	76	n/a	n/a
B425			female	107	253	79.1	n (not excavated)	hexagonal
B427	16	20	male?	91	179	69.5	y	hexagonal
B428	40	70	female	95	147.5	66.5	y	unident.
B429			undete		215	64.5	n (not excavated)	unident.
B430			n/a		215	84.5	n (not excavated)	unident.
B431			undete		162	79.5	n	unident.
B433			undete		160.5	79.5	n	n/a
B434			undete		155	79.5	n	no coffin

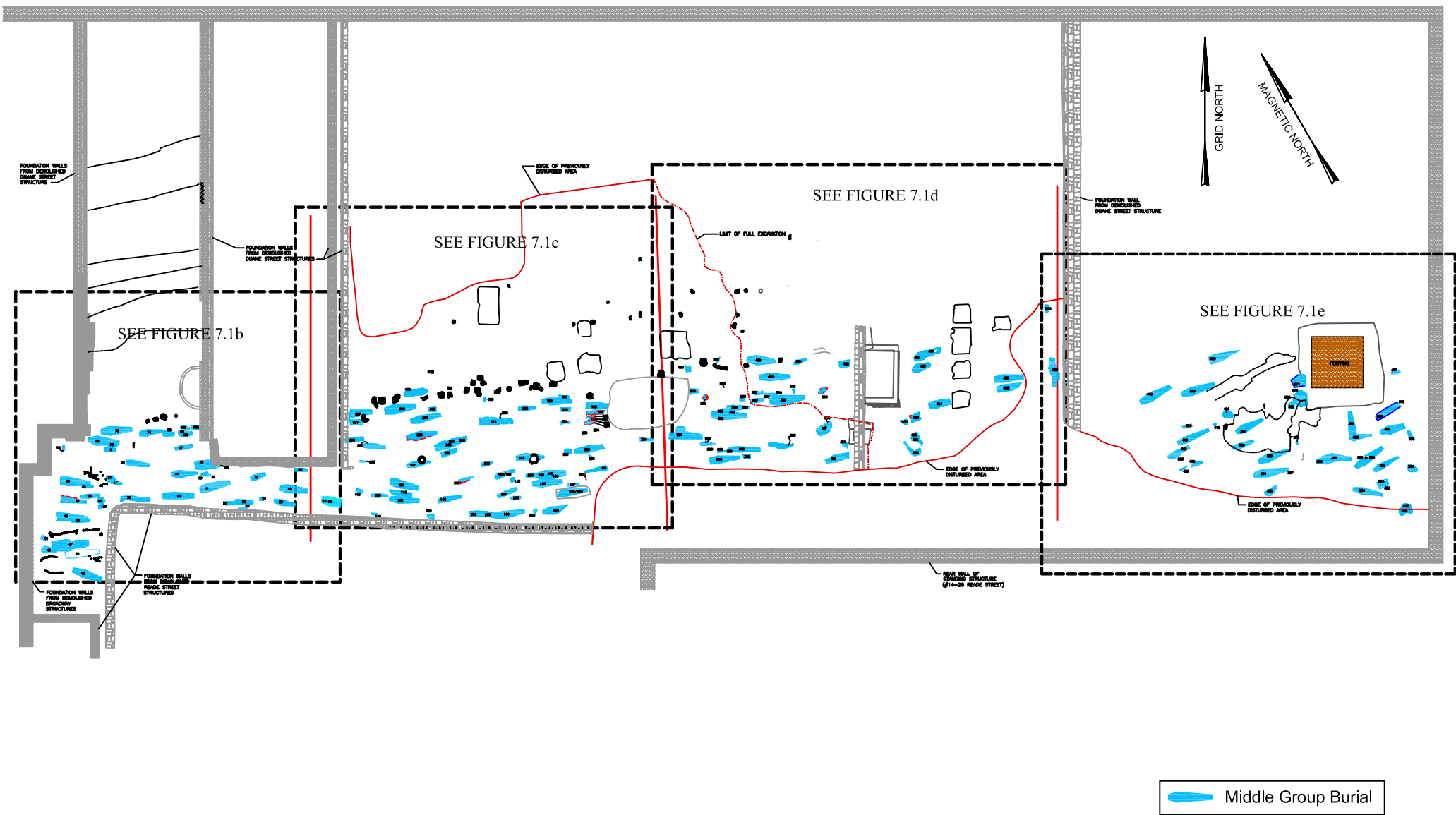
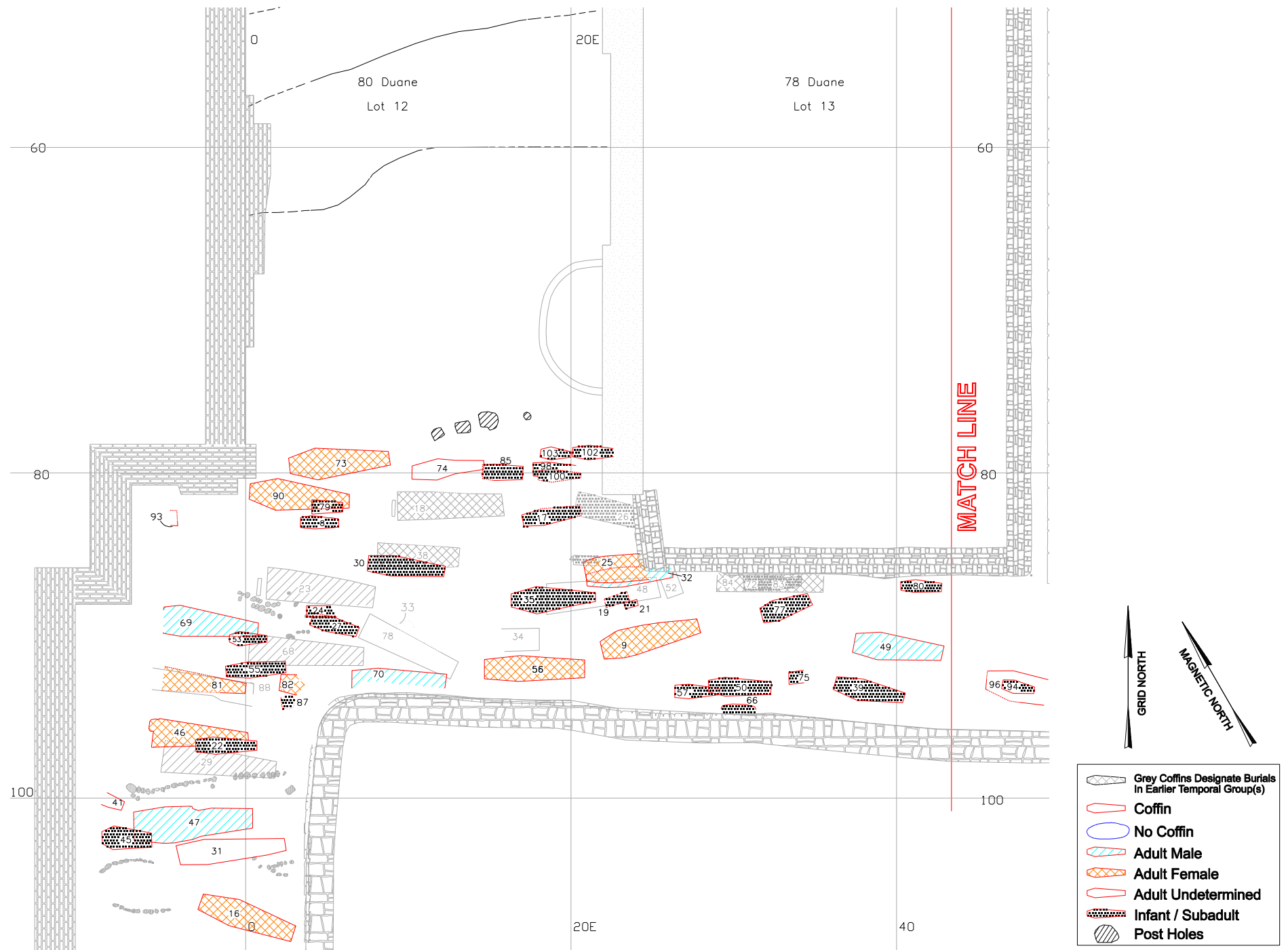
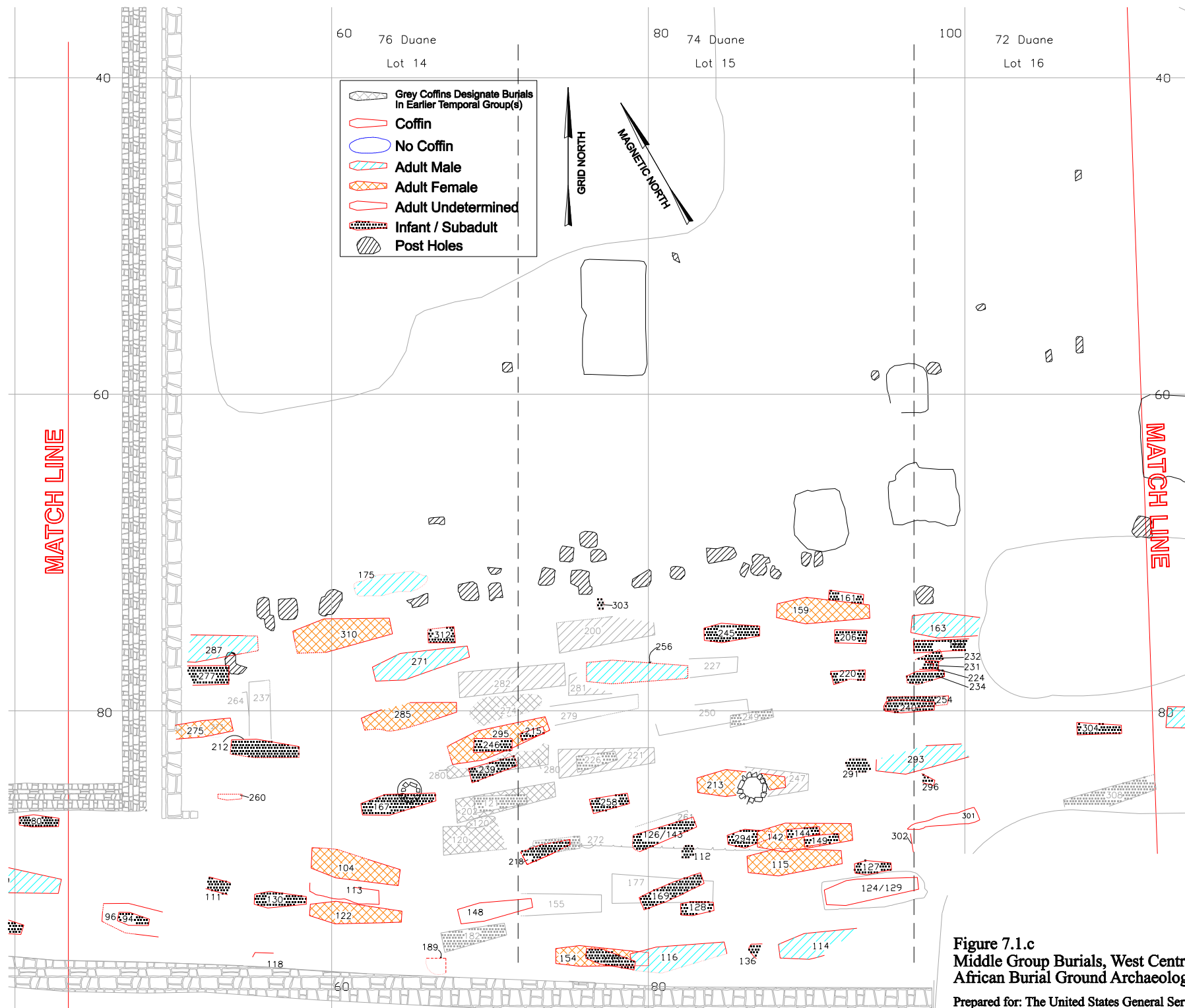


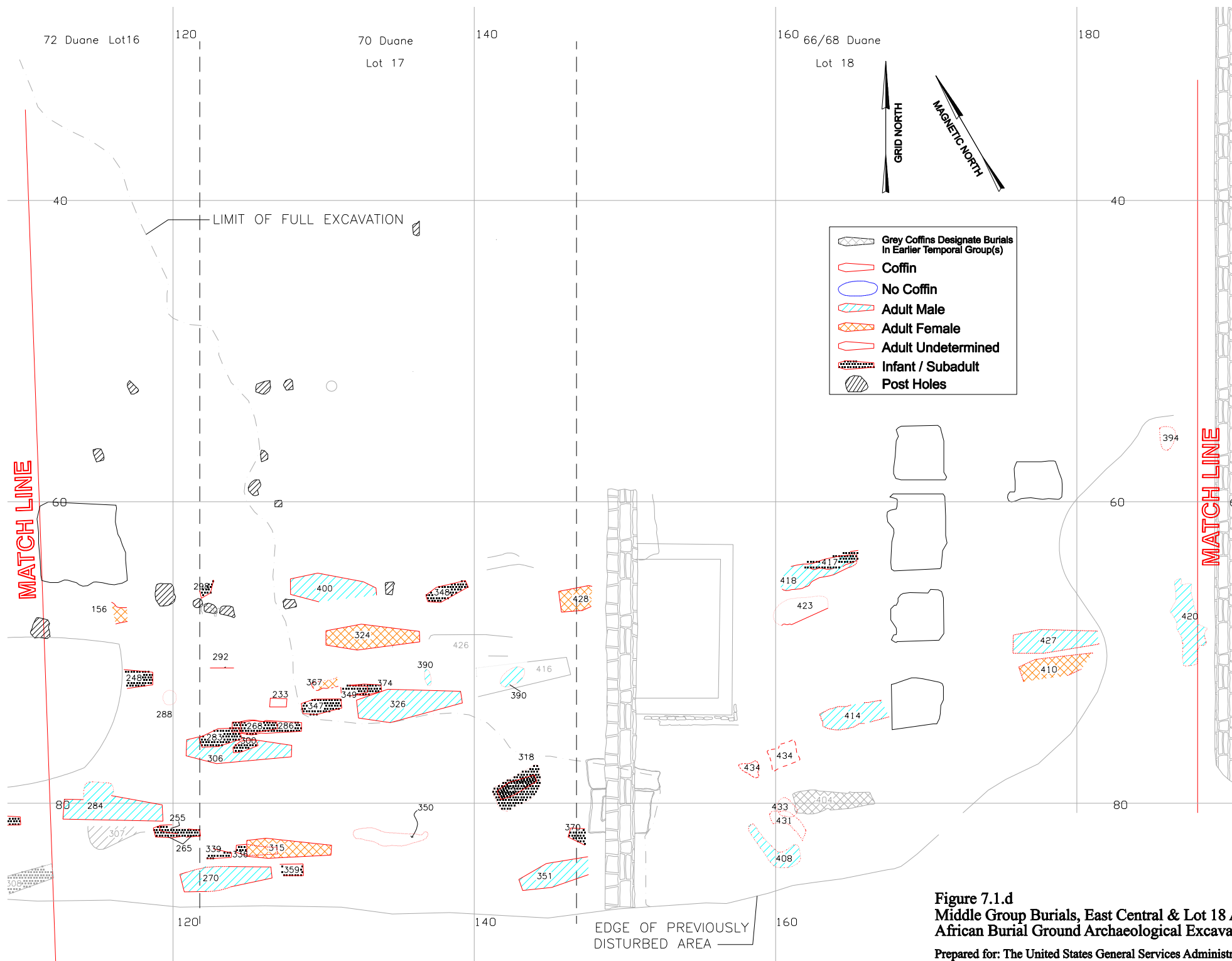
Figure 7.1.a  
Excavated Middle Group Burials  
African Burial Ground Archaeological Excavation  
Prepared for: The United States General Services Administration



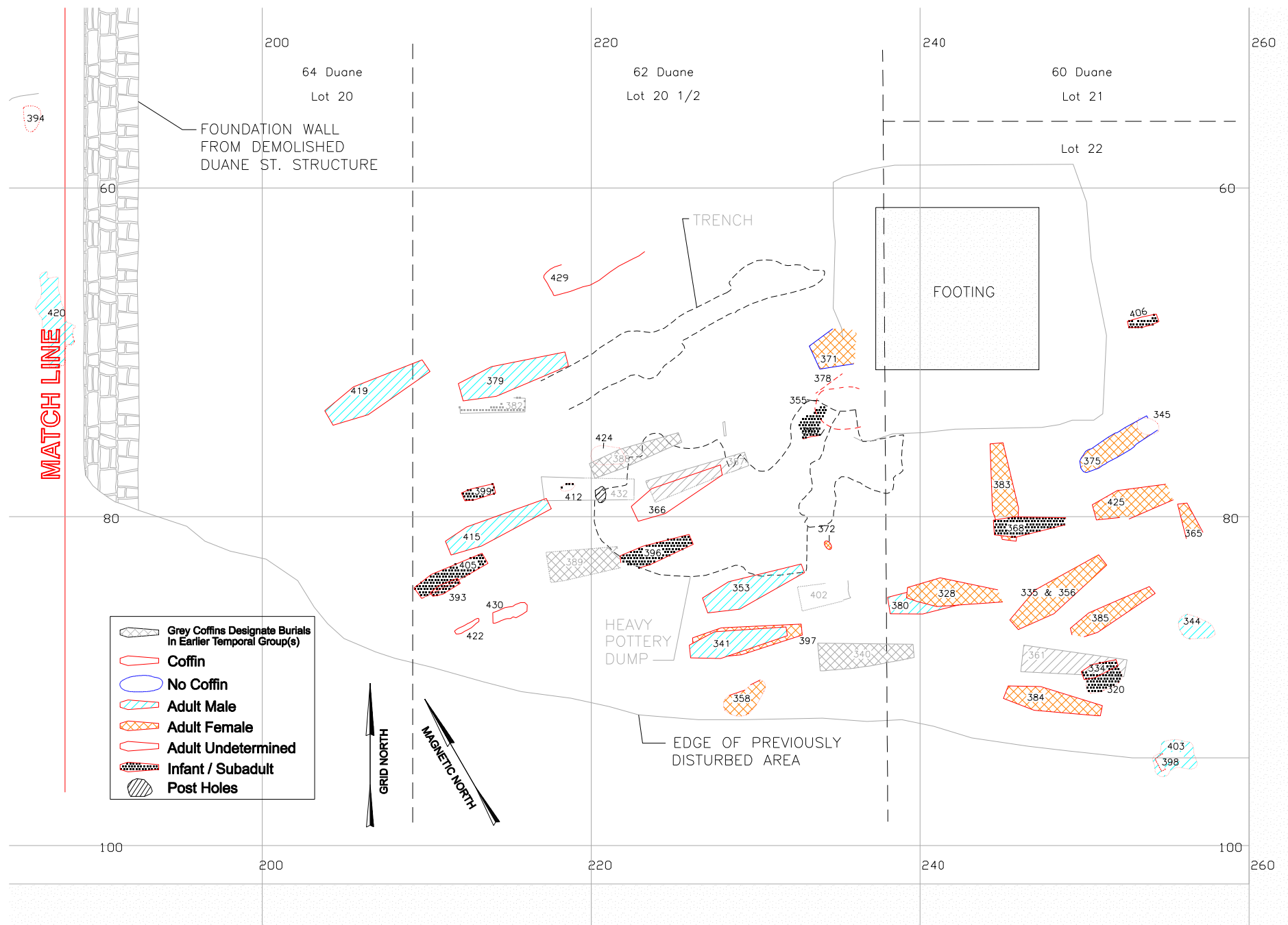
**Figure 7.1.b**  
**Middle Group Burials, Western Area**  
**African Burial Ground Archaeological Excavation**  
 Prepared for: The United States General Services Administration



**Figure 7.1.c**  
**Middle Group Burials, West Central Area**  
**African Burial Ground Archaeological Excavation**  
 Prepared for: The United States General Services Administration



**Figure 7.1.d**  
**Middle Group Burials, East Central & Lot 18 Areas**  
**African Burial Ground Archaeological Excavation**  
 Prepared for: The United States General Services Administration



**Figure 7.1.e**  
**Middle Group Burials, Eastern Area**  
**African Burial Ground Archaeological Excavation**  
 Prepared for: The United States General Services Administration

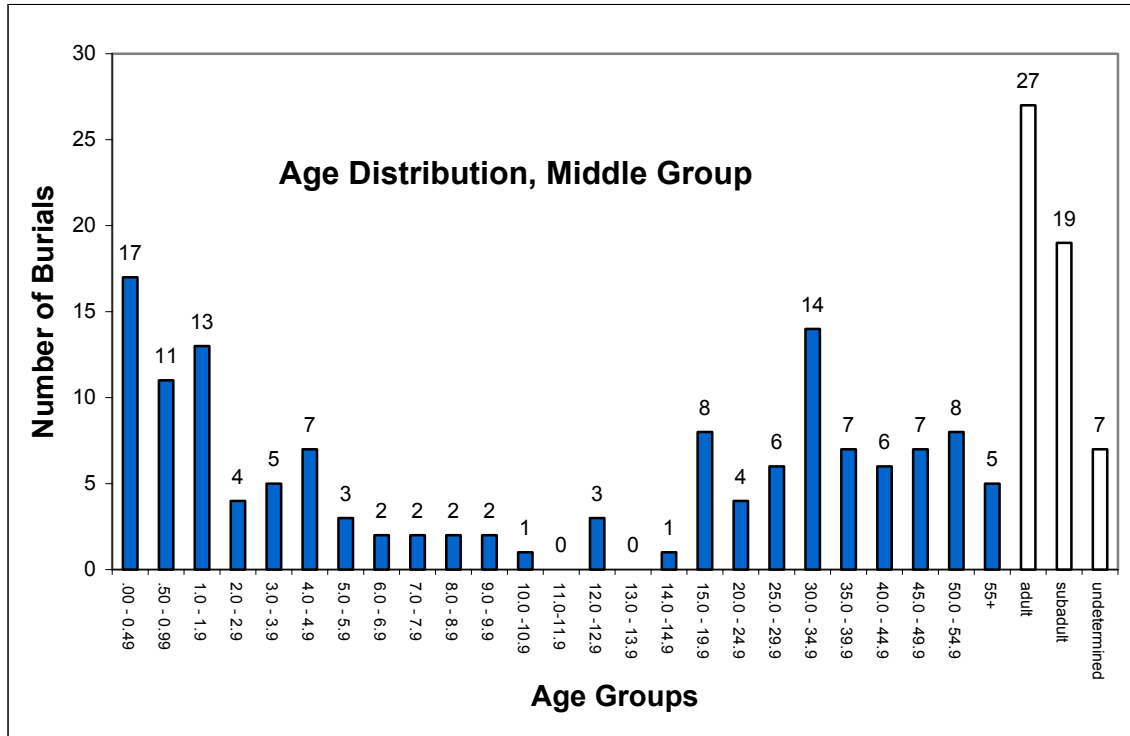


Figure 7.2.  
Age distribution, Middle Group. White bars are individuals whose age could not be determined (includes only burials from which remains were recovered).

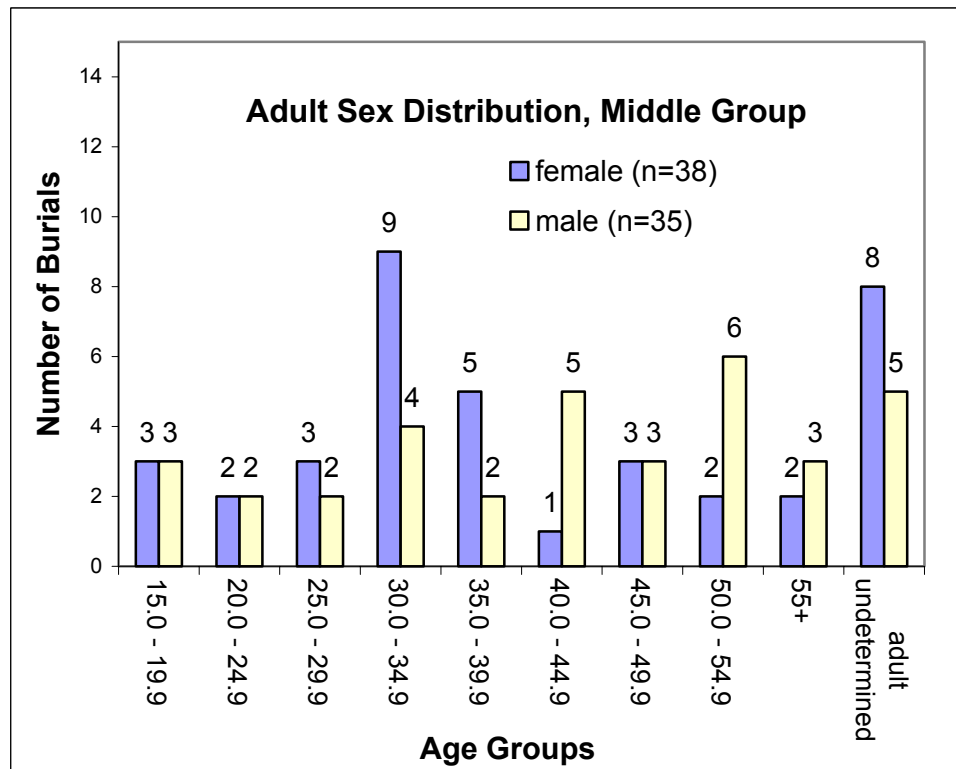


Figure 7.3.  
Adult sex distribution, Middle Group.

### **7.C. *Mortuary material culture***

Adult coffins were hexagonal by definition for the Middle Group, while the smaller coffins for sub-adults (when identifiable) were hexagonal (33), rectangular (7), tapered (5), or uncertain but four-sided (7) in shape (see Chapter 10). There were 38 subadults buried in coffins for which shape could not be determined. Only three burials without coffins are assigned to the Middle Group, Burials 371, 375, and 434. While Burial 375 is placed in this group “by default,” there being no way of distinguishing it as either early or late, Burial 371 can be assigned with more confidence due to the fact that it was found two feet beneath another adult interment. Both of these coffin-less burials are located in the southeastern site area, and both had associated artifacts of particular note (see below). Burial 434 was never completely excavated.

Pins were found with 96 of the Middle Group burials, including 63 children (see Chapter 11). Eleven individuals from the Middle Group had evidence or possible evidence for clothing (see Chapter 12). These 11 represent only 7.9% of the 139 burials that had adequate preservation for such evidence. Two women (in Burials 22 and 213) had aglets (tiny metal tubes that enclose the ends of laces and cords), which probably indicate clothing or perhaps shrouds tied with laces. The men interred in Burials 326 and 415 clearly wore trousers, the first having a row of copper-alloy domed buttons indicating a trouser “fly” and the second having thirteen copper-alloy buttons at knees and hips, representing breeches. The remaining buttons were found singly or in pairs on five men, one woman, and one adult of undetermined sex. Cuff links were found at the left wrist of the man in Burial 341.

Jewelry (see Chapter 13) was scarce, with only four burials containing items that appear to have been worn as adornment. The woman in Burial 115 wore a ring with a plain band on the third finger of her left hand, and the woman in Burial 310 had a ring with blue glass insets, also on her left hand (it is not clear which finger). A third woman (Burial 371) had two enamel cuff link faces beneath her left upper arm. They had a turquoise ground and white-and-pink surface decoration. A young child had an exceptional item of adornment, a small silver pendant on a loop, similar to an earring, which may have been strung and worn at the neck. Glass beads from unknown contexts were recovered with Burials 428 (2 specimens) and 434 (1 specimen).

Other material culture from Middle Group burials included a small glass sphere associated with Burial 410, a small crystal cluster with Burial 55, and a quartz crystal with Burial 289; shells in the coffin of Burial 22 and on the coffin lids of Burials 348, 352, 365, and 387; and several nails that may have been deliberately placed in coffins. A clay ball (roughly the size of a marble) encircled with a decorative copper band was found with possible evidence for a cloth or leather pouch in Burial 375. This unique artifact is discussed in Chapter 14, along with the glass sphere and the crystals.



#### **7.D. *Spatial distribution***

Burials assigned to the Middle Group were located throughout the excavated site except north of the fence line. For ease of discussion, the site is broken down into sub-areas, though these are defined more on the basis of preservation factors than spatial distribution of graves. The western area (Figure 7.1b) is west of grid line 45E, a line where a distinction can be seen between relatively sparse interments to the west and very dense burials to the east. This distinction may be the result of poor preservation to the rear of Lot 13, though topography probably played a role in the siting of graves, and there may have been a slope here that made it less desirable for interments (see Chapter 3). The west-central area (Figure 7.1c) extends from grid line 45E to grid line 110E. Burials are relatively dense within this sub-area, but the apparent sudden falling-off of burial frequency east of here is probably due to poor preservation, in particular because of a large construction disturbance at the rear of Lot 16. Again, we believe the original topography was important in the selection of gravesites, this sub-area having been relatively flat. The area east of Lot 16 between grid lines 110E to 150E is the east-central area (Figure 7.1d). Here burials are again quite dense, and this was probably another relatively level area within the cemetery. Further east, the rear of Lot 18 (Figure 7.1d) saw particularly heavy disturbance and is considered separately. Finally, the southeast area (Figure 7.1e) in and surrounding the pottery dump is discussed. We know that excavation was incomplete in the eastern part of the site, and burials once extended westward and northward of those exposed in this last area (i.e., there is a false appearance of a separate concentration here).

The distribution of burial orientations in the Middle Group burials is shown in Figures 5.4 and 7.1a-e. Overall, there were more southwesterly-oriented burials (relative to our grid) in this period than in the earlier group. It is possible the fence was present during part of our middle period, and that graves were oriented to it, but the town palisade, in place from 1745 through approximately 1760, may have been an even more notable landmark forming a roughly east-west axis by which to orient graves. It is also possible that more burials were oriented according to the position of the sun at sunset, due to stronger enforcement of the law restricting funerals to daylight.

It seems possible that the spatial syntax governing the placement of a grave included some standard of distance between individual interments. Even the graves of children are sometimes spaced apart from others, which suggests that at times the locations were selected not on the basis of familial/social relationships but on expedience and/or in reference to a spatial system (implicit or explicit) within which individual “plots” were appropriate. There were eight children’s graves in the Middle Group that appear to have been placed apart from other interments: Burials 39, 77, 80, 130, 258, 245, 304, and the double interment in Burial 126/143. In addition, Burials 128 and 169 were separate from others in the Middle Group; however, they overlay Early Group Burial 177 and deliberate placement with that adult cannot be ruled out. Gravediggers may have sited burials with reference to each other, leaving a certain minimum amount of space between, unless a particular relationship dictated that a grave should join or overlap an existing burial.

Overall, Middle Group burials were dispersed over much more of the excavated portion of the cemetery than were Early Group burials. It is possible that intervening areas between spatial concentrations of early burials were gradually “filled in” during subsequent decades. Though older locations were also reused, resulting in some superimposed burials, there appears to have been some effort to maintain the identity or integrity of early graves during the middle period. Thus, more than half of the early burials, including Burials 18, 23, 68, 29, 78, 34, 38, 48, 84/83, 182, 120, 202/221, 282, 200, 221/226, 177, 308, 416, 426, 404, 387, 388, 432, and 340, were left *undisturbed* by Middle Group interments, though some subsequently would be disturbed by Late Middle or Late burials.

### The western area

Middle Group burials in the western part of the excavated site (Figure 7.1b) are found in several clusters. Some of the clusters include burials that are thought to belong to earlier or later temporal groups, as discussed in Chapter 6, and in order to illustrate this, Figure 7.4 shows burials from all temporal groups in this area of the site (compare to Figure 7.1b).

One cluster includes Burials 73, 90, 79 and 8 (top left in Figure 7.4). These are located at the rear of Lot 12, just south of the projected fence line that once marked the cemetery’s north side. Burials 73 and 90 were of women in their 20s and late 30s respectively, and the infants in Burials 79 and 8 may have been placed deliberately with the older of the two women. It is also possible that a later burial, Burial 1, which lay at a higher elevation and is assigned to the Late Group, was placed deliberately with these graves. The recorded stratigraphy suggests, however, that the surface of the earlier graves may have been covered over, obscuring their locations, before Burial 1 was interred.

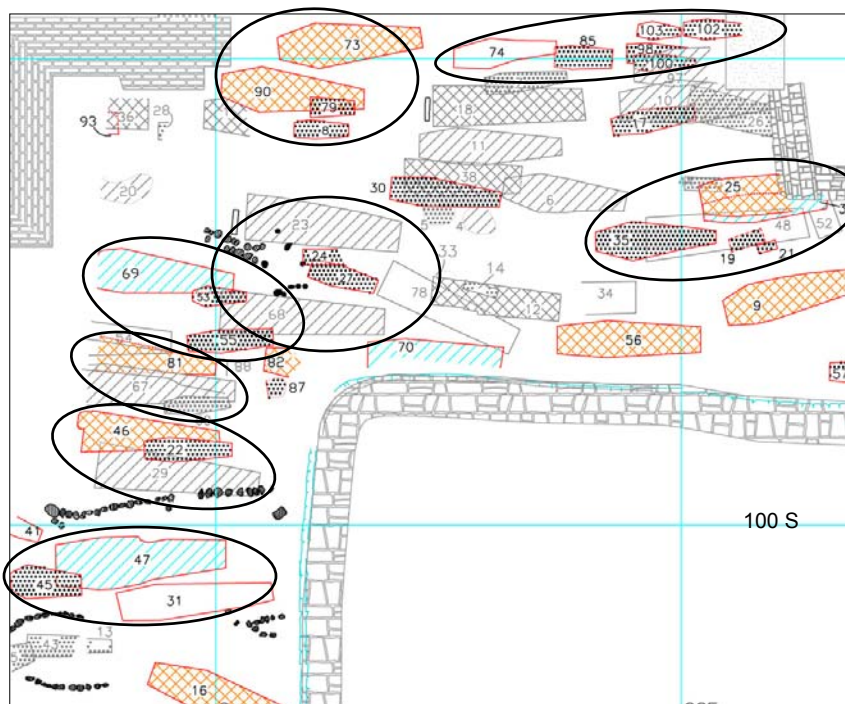


Figure 7.4.  
Detail (5W to 25E) of  
the southwestern  
corner of the site plan  
(Figure 1.7) showing  
burials from all  
temporal groups.  
Middle Group burials  
are shown in color.  
Grave clusters  
mentioned in the text  
are circled.

To the east of this group, a second cluster can be viewed as a string or line of burials, running parallel to the south side of the projected fence alignment. These graves, which include Burials 74, 85, 98/100, 103 and 102 (top right, Figure 7.4), belonged to children or infants (though no remains were recovered from the child-sized coffin in Burial 74).

Burial 53 lay at the foot of Middle Group Burial 69, and this association well may have been deliberate, but the child's grave also overlay the head of an Early Group grave, Burial 68 (left center, Figure 7.4). Burial 55, likewise, was near the foot of Middle Group Burial 81 but also at the head of Early Group Burial 68. Clusters where Middle Group burials may be associated with earlier graves have been discussed in Chapter 6. These include:

- Burials 24 and 27, infant graves among earlier Burials 23, 68, and 78 (center, Figure 7.4);
- Burials 54, 81, 67, 60, 46 and 22, which may have been deliberately placed above early Burials 29 and 88 (left center, Figure 7.4);
- Burials 25 and 32 (described in section 7.D), 35, 19, and 21, placed above Early Group Burials 44, 48 and 52 (at right in Figure 7.4).

Also discussed in Chapter 6 were Burials 22 (of a child) and 46 (of an adult woman), which may have been placed deliberately with Early Group Burial 29, a probable male adult. Burial 46, while included here with the Middle Group, also may in fact be an early burial (its coffin shape is difficult to determine). The child, between two and four years old, was in a hexagonal coffin that had been placed so as to straddle the two underlying adult burials. An east-west row of cobblestones, three to four feet above the Burial 29 coffin, separated these three burials from other interments to the south. The cobbles, averaging about 0.3' in diameter, may have formed a boundary marker between grave groups. South of the line were Burial 47, of a man of thirty-five to forty years; Burial 31, of an adolescent; and Burial 45, of a child of two to four years. The man and the adolescent may have been placed in a single large grave, though this is impossible to determine with certainty. The child was buried later, its grave overlapping the head-end of the man's grave. A thin slab of stone was found oriented vertically above the upper-body portion of Burial 47, and was identified as a possible grave marker (see Figure 5.9).

To the south of Burials 103 and 98/100, Burials 17, 35, and 56 lay in what may have been a "row," fairly evenly spaced from north to south. It is not possible to determine whether this apparent alignment was deliberate. Each of these graves was adjacent to or overlay an earlier burial. Their spacing, and that of Burials 9, 77, 80, 49, 39, and the 57- 60 - 66 cluster, suggest the positioning of burials in "plots" as mentioned above for the Middle Group.

#### The west-central area

Several clusters can be discerned among Middle Group interments in this part of the site (Figure 7.1c). One cluster centers on Middle Group Burials 96/94, an adult and child in a shared grave, located within Republican Alley behind the southeast corner of the Lot 13

basement (Figure 7.5). Surrounding and overlying this grave were those of several more children, Burials 42, 64, 61, and 91. Their placement is suggestive of deliberate association with the double grave. (Though post-dating Burials 96/94 based on superposition, and placed in our Late-Middle temporal group, it is possible these children all belong together in the main, Middle Group). A final interment, Burial 95, actually truncated the entire eastern portion of Burial 96, suggesting that the earlier grave had been forgotten or was disregarded by the gravediggers by the time the later one was dug. Because of this, Burial 95 is placed in the Late Group for this analysis.

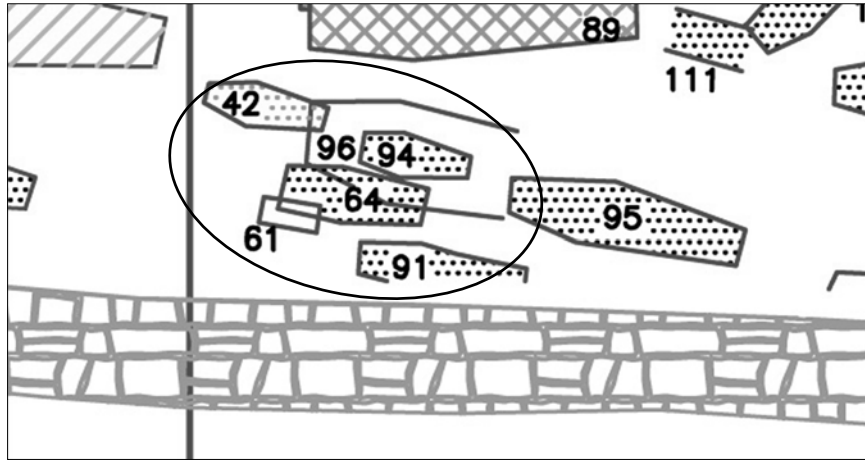


Figure 7.5.  
Detail (41 to 55E/91 to 96S) of west-central area of the site plan (Figure 1.7) showing burials from all temporal groups. The cluster containing Middle Group Burial 96/94 is circled.

Another tight clustering of burials includes Middle Group Burials 215, 246, 295 and 239 (at left center in Figure 7.6). Burial 215 was placed in the same grave as Burial 295, though possibly slightly later. All of these overlay an earlier grave, Burial 280, and in turn were overlain by a later grave, Burial 229. Early Group burials are concentrated in this area of the cemetery, including several that had no superimposed interments, as though they had been deliberately kept undisturbed. Because of this, at first the placement of a cluster of later (Middle Group) graves immediately above Burial 280 seemed as though it might have been deliberate. However, the grave of Burials 295/215 truncated both the north side of Burial 280 and the western portion of another early burial (Burial 279), suggesting that the early burials either were *not* known or not considered at the time of the later interments. Instead, we suggest that it was Middle Group Burial 295 that “anchored” the cluster of children’s burials from the Middle Group and later.

Three graves, Burials 133, 154, and 116, are clustered together near the south edge of Republican Alley (bottom center, Figure 7.6); their association is the more striking due to the gap of several feet between them and their neighbors to the north. Burial 116 was of a man between forty-five and fifty-five, Burial 154 of a woman in her late twenties, and Burial 133 of a child of one to two years. The woman and child were buried after the man.

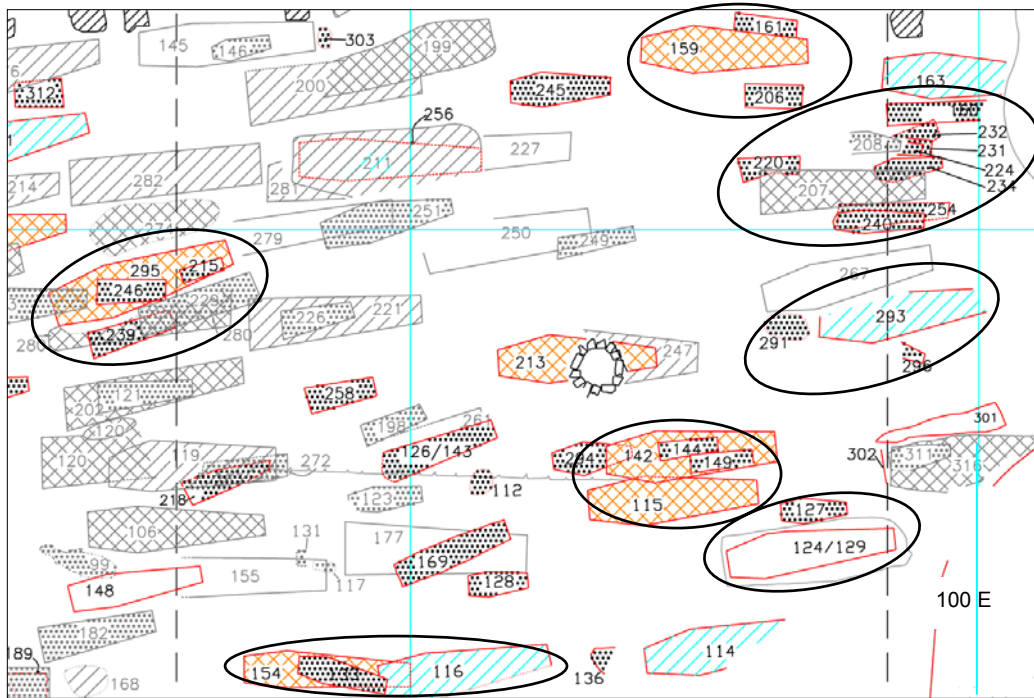


Figure 7.6.

Detail (65 to 100E/70 to 98S) of west-central area of the site plan (Figure 1.7) showing burials from all temporal groups. Middle Group burials are shown in color. Clusters mentioned in the text are circled.

Another cluster includes Burials 142/144/149 (a triple interment of a woman in her late twenties with two children), 115, and 294 (lower right quadrant, Figure 7.6). Burial 115, adjacent to the south and parallel to the woman and children, held a woman between twenty-five and thirty-five years old; her grave appears to have been dug slightly later in time than the other. The stratigraphic relationship of Burial 294 to the others is impossible to reconstruct, but it probably was the first interment of the three.

Nearby, just to the southeast, lay Burials 124/129 and Burial 127. No skeletal remains were found in the coffin of Burial 129, which was adult-sized (a few skeletal elements found in its grave fill were designated Burial 124). Burial 127, which held an infant, was immediately adjacent to the central north side of Burial 129, and the two may have been placed together deliberately.

An instance of an adult-with-children probable co-interment assigned to the Middle Group is Burials 159, 161 and 206 (top right, Figure 7.6). As noted in Chapter 5, this group comprised a woman of twenty-five to thirty-five years old and two infants/young children, who were placed on either side of the foot end of her grave.

A cluster of overlapping graves of children was excavated at the eastern edge of the rear of Lot 15, in an area severely disturbed by construction activity during the fieldwork (upper right, Figure 7.6). The interments included Burials 160, 231, 232, 224; Burials 154 and 240 slightly to the south (in an apparent shared grave); and Burial 220 slightly to the west. Adult graves lay immediately to the north (Burial 163), and immediately above (Burial 207). The child burials are placed in the Middle Group, but their possible earlier

assignment is noted in Chapter 6, where we discussed the problematic temporal assignment of Burial 207. In any case, Burial 207 was clearly later than the children's graves it overlay. It is unusual at the African Burial Ground site for an adult grave to be above children's graves. The underlying graves may not have been known to the Burial 207 gravedigger. Alternatively, this adult may have been placed here on purpose, having had some relation to the children. A partially intact late child's grave (Burial 208) and disturbed adult remains from another adult grave (Burial 204) were found in positions overlying Burial 207 and the children's graves.

Burials 291, 293, and 296 may have formed another grave cluster (right center, Figure 7.6). Burial 296 consisted only of child-sized coffin remains, Burial 291 was displaced, infant bones, and Burial 293 held an adult, possibly male. A later grave, Burial 267, disturbed Burial 293 and presumably also the infant Burial 291.

#### The east-central area

Grouped burials, what we have been calling "clusters," are few in this part of the site (Figure 7.1d). One, with an adult and several children/infants, comprises Burials 306 (this contained the adult, a man between twenty-eight and forty-four years of age), 300, 283, 268, and 286 (see Figure 7.1d, lower left). The latter two burials are infants that appear to be in a shared grave and to have been here first, with Burial 306 coming later (not placed above the infant graves but adjacent to them), followed by the remaining two.

Children's graves also lay to the east of these burials, and it is possible the grouping actually extended eastward to Burial 326, which held a man who died at forty-five to fifty-five years of age. The man had filed teeth, as did the woman represented by a displaced cranium in nearby Burial 367. It seems likely these two individuals were originally interred in close proximity to one another. In the case of Burial 367, isotope and lead analysis pointed to African birth. Burial 374, which held an infant or newborn, was found within the grave of Burial 326, on the north side near the head. Other children's graves lay above and just to the west of Burial 374. These were Burials 349, 347 and 333 (the latter consisting only of a tiny rectangular box, with no extant human remains).

South of the Burial 306 cluster was an area crowded with graves, possibly representing another extended grouping (see Figure 7.1d). The burials include, on the west, Burial 284 (of a man in his twenties), on the south Burial 270 (of another man, age undetermined), and on the east Burial 315 (of a woman between thirty and forty years old). Graves of infants and children lay between, above, and beneath these. Burial 315 lay immediately above and perfectly aligned with the infant in Burial 336. Burial 339, partially destroyed by construction activity in this location, and the shared grave of Burials 255/265, lay in the midst of these others.

Other burials in the east-central area were apart from each other and from these clusters, suggesting, as noted, that gravediggers' mental template included an offset between plots.

### The Lot 18 area

The rear portion of historic Lot 18 (Figure 7.1d) suffered disturbance from multiple 20<sup>th</sup> century construction features, including an elevator shaft and a series of concrete footings, and many graves were probably destroyed in this area. The area was never fully excavated, however, and presumably graves remain intact below and adjacent to those that were exposed by archaeologists, which numbered twelve. All were assigned to the Middle Group by default, except for Burial 404 which had a tapered coffin, and Burial 413, which had a piece of creamware (dating no earlier than 1760) in its shaft.

Due to the partial excavation and the degree of disturbance, an analysis of spatial patterning is not possible. It is possible that Burials 410 (of a woman of undetermined age who had a small amber-colored glass sphere in her grave) and 427 (of a young man in his late teens) were purposely placed adjacent to one another, as the graves were aligned and very close together.

### The southeast area

As noted, colonial New York's mid-century palisade wall may have been used, along with the direction of sunset, to orient burials along a general east-west axis. This hypothesis is strengthened by the observation that head-to-west Middle Group burials in the southeastern part of the excavated cemetery (Figure 7.1e) have a strong southwesterly trend in orientation (as do Late-Middle burials in this area). This is where the palisade, oriented southwest-to-northeast, passed closest to the excavated site (no-doubt along the ridge of "Pot-Baker's Hill"), and here is where it would have been most prominent in the landscape as gravediggers worked. There were other non-burial site features excavated in this area that also raked southwest-to-northeast, including the pottery waste midden and a filled-in trench, designated Feature 163. It is possible that the trench, midden, and burials ran parallel to the original slope of the ground here, just as the palisade wall would have.

The one-foot deep trench's function is not known, and it may have been a natural depression. Artifacts within it do not allow firm dating, but included kiln waste (Janowitz and Cheek 2003). It separated Burials 419, 379, 429, and 382 (the latter assigned to our Early Group) from the rest of the burials in this area. This part of the site was never fully excavated, and it is likely many other interments are located to the north of the trench.

A few burials lay southeast of the stoneware dump (see discussion in Chapter 4), slightly lower in elevation than the burials that were within or at the edges of the dump, and contained no fragments of stoneware whatsoever. This loose grouping includes Burials 384, 320, and 334 from the Middle Group, along with Burial 361 from the Early Group (near lower right corner of Figure 7.1e). The complete absence of kiln waste from these graves is difficult to explain except by positing that they pre-date the dump. As discussed in Chapter 4.E, Burial 384 is problematic because although devoid of stoneware and aligned adjacent and parallel to early Burial 361, its hexagonal coffin suggests it is later

than its neighbor. Burial 384 and the side-by-side children's Burials 320 and 334, all may have been placed deliberately in association with the early grave.

Though there are several paired interments in the southeast sub-area, clusters are not discerned. Shown on Figure 7.1e (moving left to right), the pairs include Burials 393 and 405 (of an infant with a child of 6 to 10 years); Burials 341 and 397 (of a man and a woman); Burials 328 and 380 (a man and a woman both over forty years old, possibly interred together, though not at the same time); and Burial 335/356, of a woman with an infant cradled in her arm. A unique pair (not sharing a grave) was formed by Burials 383 and 368, the latter lying perpendicular to the former such that the heads overlapped (see below for more on Burial 383, a south-headed interment).

### **7.E. Unique and unusual burials**

#### **Burials 25 and 32: A violent death and a shared grave**

The remains in Burial 25 were of a woman whose age was calculated as twenty to twenty-four. Lodged beneath her fourth left rib was a lead musket ball, slightly flattened (Figure 7.7). Her coffin had been placed atop that of an older man (aged fifty to sixty; Burial 32) and precisely aligned with it, so that a deliberate co-interment is postulated (Figure 7.8).



The bullet's point of entry cannot be definitively determined, though there was a large hole at the center of the shattered left scapula, and it is possible the woman was shot through her upper left back. Bone fractures suggest that she also had suffered a blunt-force trauma to the face; an oblique fracture of her lower right arm had resulted from twisting. A small trace of new bone around the fractures suggested that she lived for a short while after the fractures occurred (no more than a few days). The woman's skeleton showed scarring on each ulna (one of the two lower arm bones) where the muscles attached at the elbows, suggesting habitual activity using these muscles (see Wilczak et al. 2004 [Chapter 11 of the Skeletal Biology Report]).

Figure 7.7.  
*In situ* photograph of musket ball lodged in ribcage of the woman in Burial 25. Photograph by Dennis Seckler.



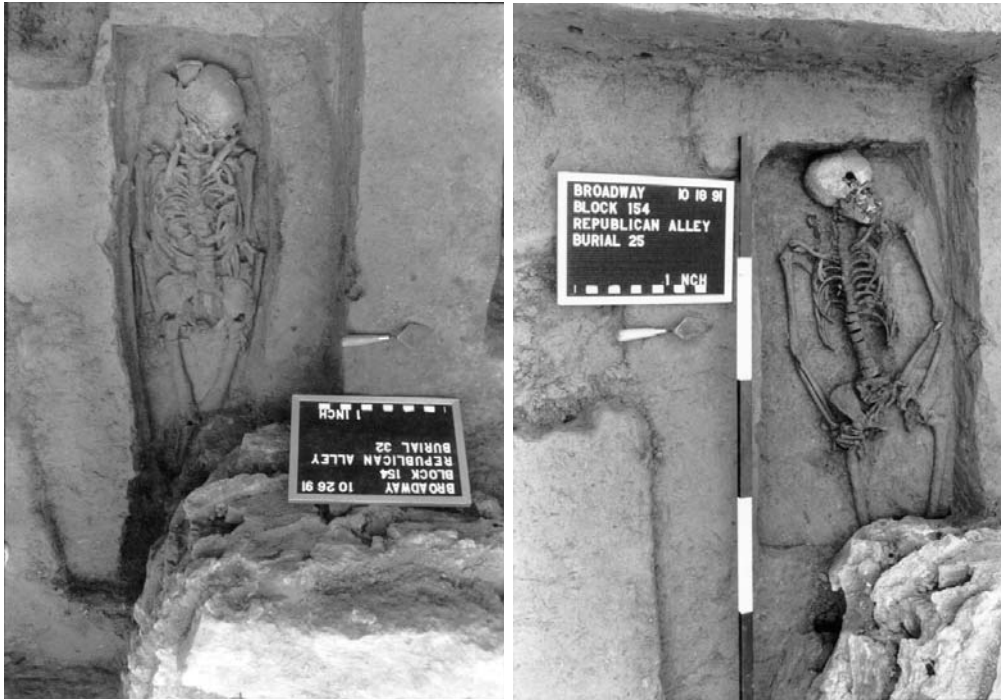


Figure 7.8.

*In situ* photographs of Burials 25 (left) and 32 (right). The burials may have shared a grave, and both were disturbed by the construction of a foundation wall on Lot 13. The heads are to the west. The ruler alongside burial 32 is measured in feet. Photographs by Dennis Seckler.

#### Burial 175: A secondary burial

Burial 175 consisted of bones found in the grave of Burial 257. Though completely disarticulated, the skeletal elements from Burial 175 were almost all accounted for, and were identified as those of a man between age twenty-four and twenty-eight. One possible scenario is of gravediggers coming upon the earlier grave, removing all of the bones, and then carefully replacing them atop the new coffin. Although the disturbance may have been accidental, another possibility is that these remains represent a deliberate exhumation followed by secondary burial. In this case, the bones may have been placed within the grave of a recently deceased relative.



Figure 7.9.

*In situ* photograph of Burial 175, bones placed atop the coffin of Burial 257. North is to right, and the ruler laid alongside the burial is measured in feet. Photograph by Dennis Seckler.

### Burials 74 and 129: empty coffins

There were no human remains found in the coffin excavated as Burial 74. The grave was located in the far western part of the site, at the rear of Lot 12 (Figure 7.1.b). The shaft outline was rectangular in shape and the coffin was hexagonal, with its head to the west. It was approximately 4.5' long, suggesting that it had held a child. Nails were recorded *in situ* around the perimeter of the coffin, though only at the bottom. Since this coffin was of a probable child, it is possible the skeletal remains simply had decayed with no trace; however, judging by other child burials at the site, we expect that some teeth would have been preserved *in situ*.

Burial 129 also contained no skeletal remains. There were scattered adult skeletal remains (three teeth, an occipital fragment of the skull, and the distal end of a humerus) recovered from the grave fill soil, and excavators hypothesized that when Burial 129 was interred it completely displaced another burial (designated Burial 124). It is not possible to determine whether one or two burials are actually represented. The coffin lid recorded as belonging to Burial 129 was fairly well preserved, though, and it is difficult to envision how or why the remains were removed from within it and somehow scattered. The coffin was first drawn as four-sided, slightly tapered toward the foot (east) end; however, the final burial drawing represents the coffin as hexagonal in shape.

As discussed in Chapter 6, either the deceased were removed from their coffins after interment, or empty coffins were interred intentionally. Secondary burial and grave robbing are possible scenarios in the first case, while burial of an empty coffin might point to religious practice or to deception.

### South-headed and east-headed burials

Burials 383 and 365, south-headed women's burials in the southeast area of the site, were discussed in Chapter 5. The orientation of the head of the infant in Burial 406, also located at the far eastern edge of site, was toward the east. The coffin shape was unclear: it appeared to be six-sided but the "shoulder" was not obvious. There is a possibility that the position of the infant within the coffin was not known to those who placed it in the grave, and thus that the unusual orientation was accidental.

### Burials 142/144/149: a triple grave

In this grave, a woman between twenty-five and thirty years of age was buried along with two infants, one whose age was calculated at less than two months, and one thought to have been between six and twelve months old at death. The three were in separate coffins. The tiny coffins of the children, Burials 144 and 149, had been placed so as to both fit on the top of the woman's (Figure 7.10).

Either all three were interred at the same time, or the infants were buried together after the woman. In the other two instances at the African Burial Ground where a woman shared a grave with an infant (Burials 12/14 and 335/356), the infant had been placed within the coffin of the adult.



Figure 7.10.  
*In situ* photograph of Burials 142, 144, and 149. The outlines of the individual coffins are indicated. The ruler alongside the woman's coffin is measured in feet, and north is to the right. Photograph by Dennis Seckler.